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STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID
USAID/W FOR A/AID ANDREW NATSIOS, JBRAUSE
DCHA/OFDA GGOTTILIEB, MMARX, RTHAYER, BDEEMER
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA
SOUTH ASIA ACTION TEAM
SOUTH ASIA EARTHQUAKE TASK FORCE
DCHA/FFP FOR JONATHAN DWORKEN
ANE DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR MARK WARD
BANGKOK FOR OFDA SENIOR REGIONAL ADVISOR TOM DOLAN
KATHMANDU FOR OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WILLIAM BERGER
ROME PASS FODAG
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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN - EARTHQUAKE: UN PERFORMANCE SHOWS
IMPROVEMENT BUT OVERALL LEADERSHIP STILL LACKING

REF: A) ISLAMABAD 17311 B) ISLAMABAD 17632

SUMMARY

1. More than two months into the earthquake relief effort, the UN has made some improvements in response to early criticisms of start-up delays and performance issues reported in ref A. However, a lack of overall UN leadership, poor coordination, and insufficient staff continues to undermine the Pakistan earthquake response. Most urgently, the UN should deploy a disaster expert to oversee the entire UN humanitarian operation. End summary.

Overview of the Response

2. The humanitarian community marshaled massive resources to respond to the devastating October 8 earthquake in Pakistan. Overwhelming humanitarian needs, difficult terrain, and harsh winter weather conditions make the response particularly challenging. There were also a large number of stakeholders, including numerous donors, humanitarian agencies, and GOP officials.

3. Rather than deploying a disaster expert to supervise multi-UN agency efforts at the start of the earthquake response, the UN Resident Coordinator who was already overseeing the UN Development Program's portfolio in Pakistan became the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (UNHC). The deployment of OCHA's Director for Coordination and Response Kevin Kennedy was a welcome step to pull together the efforts of UN agencies more effectively, but Mr. Kennedy's tenure in Pakistan was too brief.

4. The UN also piloted a cluster lead system to replace the collaborative approach of informal sectoral working groups that had been employed in previous emergencies. Under the cluster system, agencies are appointed as leads to represent the interests of and formally develop a strategy for an entire sector. Therefore, the cluster response places heavy demands on staff time for meetings and planning, taking away from operations. Cluster leads are also failing to communicate and coordinate among themselves, which is hampering an integrated response. While it may be too late to abandon the cluster approach in Pakistan, the UN needs leadership to pull together the cluster leads to ensure more information-sharing and cohesion among and across the sectors.

--Coordination and Information Management--

5. Undermining UN coordination and information sharing is the inadequate staffing of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In particular, OCHA's Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) has insufficient staff to manage and respond to large-scale information needs. According to its mandate, the HIC serves as the primary information collection point and gathers information submitted voluntarily by NGOs, other UN agencies, and the GOP. Cluster leads are responsible for submitting sector information to the HIC; however, they have not yet developed standardized reporting formats. Without enough HIC staff,

there is no comprehensive information management system, and competing and often contradictory information streams have emerged.

Progress of Individual UN Agencies

--Relief commodities--

17. There were significant early logistical problems managing air cargo shipments arriving at Islamabad Airport (Ref A). These have receded with improved inventory of incoming goods, and the slowdown in the number of airlifts arriving. One remaining concern is that current UNJLC procedures do not identify transportation missions according to urgency of need but by location and access. As a result, transportation is logical and efficient, but may fail to consider time sensitivity.

18. A UN Operational Data Management Team is now being formed to collect information systematically about the commodities pipeline. The arrival of a new UNJLC head on December 13 may also improve information collection and dissemination.

--WFP Food Assistance--

19. WFP has made progress since ref A and the food aid pipeline is healthy. WFP field staff is dedicated and knowledgeable; in general, WFP and its cooperating partners are doing a competent and sometimes innovative job. One concern is that WFP may have too quickly passed its responsibility to the GOP in Mansehra. NGOs there are frustrated with the closure of WFP's office, which has temporarily left the logistics, food and nutrition, and information technology clusters without leadership.

--Essential Services--

10. UNICEF staff have demonstrated strong technical skills in the water and sanitation sector. Some UNICEF staff have shown more initiative than others, but have generally coordinated well with local government officials and the overall effort has been satisfactory to very good. One concern is that UNICEF field staff are overstretched and unable to monitor closely projects in such a large coverage area. To augment UNICEF efforts, the USAID/DART provided technical assistance to repair the damaged well at Mehra camp. USAID also funded two staff positions through an NGO partner to provide surge capacity and oversight of water and sanitation activities.

11. The Camp Management Cluster lead, UNHCR, has doubled its camp management budget and increased the number of personnel and teams in the field per ref B. To date, UNHCR has received USD 30 million in contributions, which is sufficient to cover camp management through March 2006, when the FRC and UNHCR plan to close camps.

Comment and Recommendations

12. Overall, UN agencies have made progress since the early days of the response. The deployment of experienced staff including Kevin Kennedy, and WFP Chief of Logistics Service, Amer Daoudi, led to significant improvements in UN operations. The UN Secretary General, as well as directors from UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO traveled to Pakistan in the past two months, helped to rally agencies, efforts. Post also welcomes the announcement of former President Bush as Special Envoy for the South Asia Earthquake Disaster to pressure donors to honor pledges made in Geneva and Islamabad.

13. Although most individual agencies have shown improvement since ref A, the lack of sufficient staff and poor overall coordination continue to undermine the earthquake response. Post recommends the following:

a) The UN should immediately deploy a disaster expert to assume the role of the UNHC and oversee the entire UN operation. Post recommends conveying this recommendation to the UN Secretary General, possibly through former President Bush. At present, there is no leadership to hold the cluster leads accountable and ensure that information is shared between the field to headquarters and across different clusters. The UNHC also needs special authorities for procurement and staffing.

b) Introduction of the cluster system concept was inappropriate for this major disaster response. At this stage, it is too late to abandon the cluster approach, but the situation would improve by deploying UN staff with disaster experience and improving decision making authority for cluster leads.

c) The HIC lacks sufficient staff to manage and disseminate incoming data. Competing systems must be streamlined to better prioritize immediate interventions, identify gaps, and avoid duplication of efforts.

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